

Mississippi River, Let's Protect Our People

Editor's Note: *This is Rep. Jo Ann Emerson's response to the November 21, 2002 lead editorial in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch entitled "Mississippi River, Let It Flood", which we printed last week. The editors of the Post-Dispatch had not seen fit to print it at our deadline Tuesday. We'll try to let you know next week if they have changed their minds.*

By Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (MO-08)

"I know that my retirement will make no difference in its cardinal principles, that it will always fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption, always fight demagogues of all parties, never belong to any party, always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor, always remain devoted to the public welfare, never be satisfied with merely printing news, always be drastically independent, never be afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory plutocracy or predatory poverty." (POST-DISPATCH PLATFORM, Joseph Pulitzer, April 10, 1907)

This Joseph Pulitzer quote appeared just above your editorial of November 21, 2002, entitled "The Mississippi River, Let it Flood." If the editorial writers believed this Joseph Pulitzer quote, they would have taken an entirely different approach.

The flood protection which was so cavalierly described as "ill considered" in this editorial is anything but ill-considered.

Before addressing the falsehoods in the editorial, let's first describe the area that is encompassed in the St. Johns-New Madrid Flood Protection Project.

This project has been on the drawing board for 50 plus years. It would keep the Mississippi River from flooding homes, farms, businesses and highways.

It considers the environmental concerns and mitigates for any perceived damages.

This project will grant the citizens of Southeast Missouri advantages that many in urban areas take for granted.

It gives my constituents simple things like protection from flooding, protection of their property from damage and the ability to work and raise their families in a safe environment, secure from the ravages of floods and disease.

The affected communities are small, agrarian and poor, but their will and commitment to a better future is undying.

The hypocrisy of this situation is unnerving because we are sacrificing the needs of many for the wishes of a few elitists. If this project were in Chesterfield, St. Charles or St. Louis, there would be an outcry that it has not been built before now.

The editorial fails to mention that such diverse groups as Ducks Unlimited, the Missouri NAACP, organized labor, the Missouri Farm Bureau and every school, hospital, ambulance district and city in the area supports this project because it is good for people and the environment.

In spite of the disinformation spread by environmental elitists - late summer floods are not normal - resulting raw sewage in homes is not normal - contaminated drinking water is not normal, and minority children being transported to school through flood waters in livestock trailers is not only not normal, it is damn wrong!

Ask Jim Robinson, Mary Williams and others whose family members became sick and died because of backwater born diseases.

You can even ask one of the small business owners in the area like Duke and Pat McDonald who own one of the two major grocery stores in East Prairie. Is McDonald's Food Mart, a struggling small business that serves the community, less important than the Wal-Mart store in the Chesterfield flood valley which is now protected by a new levee?

If the editorial board of the *Post-Dispatch* wanted to follow the admonition of Joseph Pulitzer, they would support the project because it would be "opposing the privileged classes.... and showing sympathy to the poor..."

Since the Board chose not to support the thousands of poor people who would be impacted favorably by this project, they should remove Pulitzer's admonition from the editorial page and admit they care more about appeasing environmental elitists than helping the poor folks of Pinhook. They care more about perpetuating falsehoods than reporting facts.

They want to stay protected behind their flood walls and levee in St. Louis and Chesterfield while the folks in Missouri's Bootheel continue to suffer.

In closing, I think Joseph Pulitzer would put the welfare of the people before the politics of the radical environmental movement, and I truly believe his editorial would be for this project and not against it. In fact, the title of his editorial would likely have been, "Mississippi River, Let's Protect Our People..."

Rep. Jo Ann Emerson represents Missouri's Eighth District. She and her late husband, Representative Bill Emerson who served 1980-1996, have spent more than 22 years working with the residents of East Prairie and Pinhook to complete the St. John's-New Madrid Flood Protection Project.